

About this report

This report is further to the analysis of entries to Liverpool City Council's creative writing competition 'Dear Mayor...'. Launched in December 2021, primary school children across the Liverpool LGA were invited to submit their responses to three questions about the neighbourhood in which they live and their experience of home learning, for the opportunity to enter a prize draw.

The analysis and reporting of children's responses has been undertaken by Mission Australia's Communities for Children (C4C) Facilitating Partner team. The '2168' Communities for Children program funds a range of prevention and early intervention activities in and around the '2168' postcode due to its identification as a location with high levels of vulnerabilities across a range of domains. Funded by the Commonwealth Government's Families and Children Activity, current activities funded under C4C include Council's Children's Parliament.

The thematic analysis was undertaken in two parts utilizing two approaches, one inductive, the second deductive. Firstly, key themes were identified based on key word emerging in the text, with subsequent grouping of these words by association to form broader categories or themes. This preliminary report presents the findings from the analysis of Question 1: *What makes a neighbourhood a better place for everyone?*

Respondents

In total, responses from 483 children from eleven primary schools were analysed for this report. Children represented eleven schools (55% government; 45% Catholic), with participation (based on total enrolments) ranging from 1 in 10 students (lowest) to 1 in 3 (35%) students. Based on Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) participating schools represented some of the most and least disadvantaged in the Liverpool LGA.

What children told us?

On being asked what would make their neighbourhood a better place for everyone children were asked to think about the place they live, their neighbours and their street. They were asked to consider what they liked and what could be improved.

While many children focussed on their neighbourhood, some identified broader societal issues. Issues included: access to healthcare, access to housing, care for the vulnerable, animal welfare and environmental degradation. Some children identified the link between local and global issues articulating how their action at the local, neighbourhood level relates to broader society and environment. This is illustrated in the example given by one child, and their suggestion and rationale for inclusion of 'more trees' in their neighbourhood: from creating a more attractive neighbourhood, to providing shade from the sun and harmful UV rays, to releasing oxygen into and removing carbon dioxide from, the atmosphere.

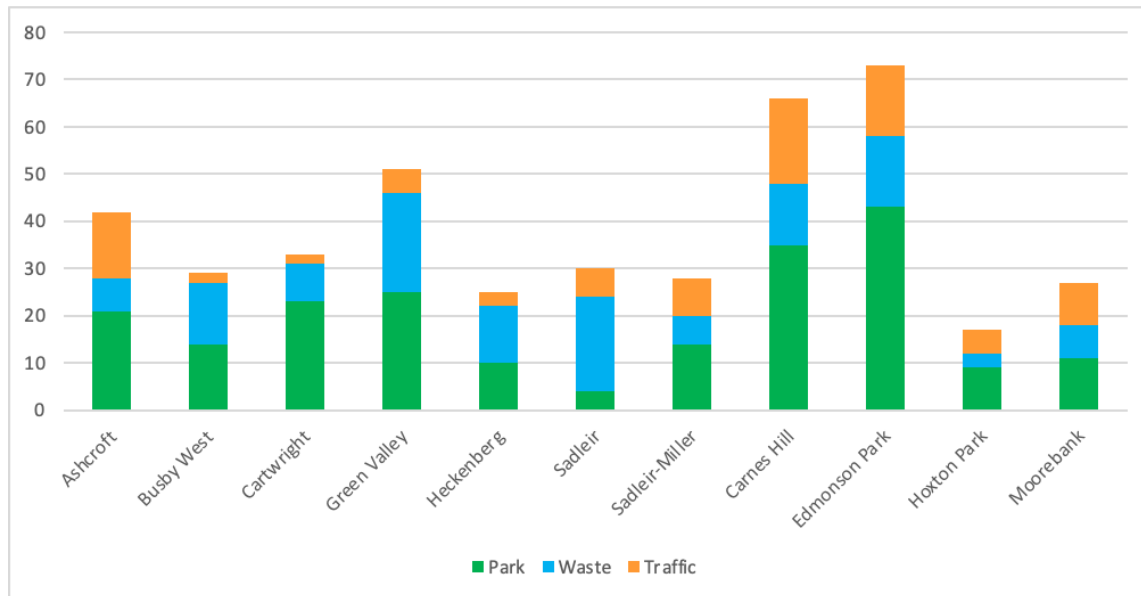
Most children included more than one item/suggestion in their response. The thematic analysis was undertaken utilising an inductive approach with key themes by which findings have been organised and reported emerging further to analysis of the data.

The top three (3) themes/items¹ were:

- Parks
- Waste, and
- Accessibility (Movement and transport)

As illustrated in Figure 1 (below), whilst common to almost all children, the emphasis placed on each issue varied across suburbs and likely reflects the particularities of place.

Figure 1: Top 3 themes/items



A limitation of interpreting the findings as representative of a particular locality/suburb under which it reported is that not all children reside in the suburb in which their school is located.

Beyond the implicit relationship between COVID-19 and home-learning, the focus of Question 2 and 3 (forthcoming), the explicit references to COVID-19 were minimal (3%, n15). However, while parks were identified as an important space and place for children particularly as they emerged from COVID-19 'lockdown' and returned to experiencing 'normal' aspects of a 'pre-COVID' childhood. Other references to COVID-19 referred to the importance of accessing health care (including vaccinations), social distancing and economic impacts on households.

A summary of suggestions/opinions is included in the Appendix 1.

'Bigger, better, more': the place of Parks

2 in 5 children (43%/n209) told us that Parks would make their neighbourhood a better place for everyone. Parks were more important to some children than others. Children in Cartwright and Green Valley were three times more likely to identify Parks as the most important feature compared to children in Busby (West), Sadleir and Hoxton Park. Parks were identified as a space and place to:

- have fun (with friends and family)
- enjoy nature
- exercise, and
- Interact with people and animals ('safely).

¹ By number of respondents who identified this theme/item rather than number of times the word appears.

Children identified the potential for 'outdoor' or external spaces to 'disconnect' from technology and connect with family, friends and the wider public.

What makes a park enjoyable for everyone?

In thinking about what they like and what could be improved children responses identified key design features, (recreational/leisure) experiences, and general amenity. Common design features/elements of the Parks included:

- Diversity of recreational experiences (interests, ages, passive/active)
- Park furniture and amenities to encourage whole-of-family use (e.g. BBQs, toilets, all-sage playgrounds)

General areas for improvement included:

- Regular maintenance and repair (equipment and green areas)
- Bins to encourage tidiness
- Lighting for general safety

General amenities such as toilets, shelter and bins were identified as important features to attract more families to Parks. Some children reported the equipment in their park as 'old and rusty' (Ashcroft). Whilst different children placed different emphases on what they would like to see in local parks, the general, the collective view is nicely captured in this response from a child in Green Valley:

My neighbourhood would be a better place for everyone if the government constructed more parks in the area. sinking your feet into the warm grass. The rays shining onto you, crawling on your skin, given you an extra layer of warmth. A layer of comfort, giggling and running. Talking and playing. The signs of real childhood memories. Parks will help and flourish kids with health benefits and socialising. Building relationship with friends and family. Making you fit and gain strength. Cherishing the fond memories as a child.

As evidenced from Figure 1, whilst some opinions were shared by children from different suburbs, some items were particular to a specific locality.

'Rubbish, rubbish, rubbish'

Emerging as the second biggest issue (26%, 125 children), the problem of rubbish was attributed to people's behaviour ('littering') and a lack of bins. Many children identified the issue of littering and rubbish with the broader environmental impacts, from birds feeding from bins in parks to marine life suffocating on plastic and associated debris. Many children saw their local community as the solution to the problem, identifying both the opportunity to take action to clean up the rubbish and in coming together around a local issue from which they could all benefit:

Rubbish here, rubbish there rubbish everywhere. Littering pollution is a major problem which occurs in my neighbourhood as well as others. This is why we must start doing local/community clean-ups. This won't only help the environment around us but how our community gathers to get there and lifts our spirits. Would you like our community to keep looking like a junk yard?

Next Steps

The competition offered an important opportunity for children to share their opinions and offer suggestions about their neighbourhood including the improvements they would like to see that would make it a better neighbourhood for everyone. This is consistent with Council's commitment to participation and its 'child friendly' agenda more broadly.

Through its partnership with Mission Australia in the '2168' postcode, Council has the opportunity explore these themes in more detail with some of the children who have participated in this competition. However, these schools and their children are not representative of the broader Liverpool community. Furthermore, due weight needs to be accorded to the views of children as reflects their relative maturity and capabilities. It is therefore important that alternative platforms and partnerships need to be explored if Council is to commit to meaningful engagement with children on the four key questions which underpin the new Community Strategic Plan:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be in 10 years?
- How will we get there?
- How will we know when we have arrived?

Recommendations

- Engagement with a broader sample of children across the Liverpool LGA
- Focused discussions on main themes/topics with children from participating schools
- Citizen 'science' projects and exploratory 'visioning' workshops in local neighbourhood(s)

Limitations

However, there are several factors that limit the generalisability of these findings. These limitations include:

- The sample of children is not representative of the general (Liverpool) population. Only 1 in 3 primary schools participated in the competition, with responses received by approximately 12% of enrolled students
- This report has assumed each response is unique to a child (i.e. reflects opinions/views of one child)
- No age details for children – responses may only reflect only some ages/stages and interests.

Maree Collins
Program Manager
Mission Australia (Miller Pathways)

28 February 2022

Appendix 1: Summary of comments/suggestions by key area

Urban vitality, culture and diversity	
Issue	Suggestion
Public space: design, amenity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walking trail with signs/information • Clean and green spaces (parks, community gardens) • Structured and less structured areas in parks • Public toilets
Major attractions (destination location)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major 'city-wide' event or attraction (Christmas, sporting, theme park, carnival/fairs) • Sports stadium (football, soccer) • Free events
Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities for children and families • Christmas lights (competition) • Markets • Fundraising for charities
Land use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mix of shops, restaurants, housing and recreational facilities • Parks and other facilities within walking distance • Mix of infrastructure and services in new suburbs (balancing development with over-development and lack of green space)
Culture and heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events to celebrate different cultures represented in community • Education on understanding different cultures represented in community • Cultural centre and education about Aboriginal people • Language classes • Cooking classes
Art spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Erasable wall for drawing in parks • Place to create art (and be inspired by art/artists)
Retail/hospitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More cafes/restaurants • Refurbishment of local shops (Heckenberg)

Community and Housing	
Issue	Suggestion
Support for people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping vulnerable people (e.g. homeless) by providing material assistance • Support for equipment and resources to participate in school (technology, stationery, clothing) • Community transport (for elderly, disabled) • Assistance for small business owners in local shopping precincts • <i>Support for children's mental health and wellbeing</i>
Community Action/Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping each other – knock on neighbours' doors offering help, getting to know each other • People are kind and nice to each other • People are treated fairly

Community and Housing	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educating people to change anti-social behaviours: littering, racism • Bringing people together to clean neighbourhood (e.g. collect rubbish) • Bringing people together to celebrate cultural diversity • Opportunity for people to contribute their suggestions to how to improve the community • Organise regular meetings for neighbours to pursue ideas or take action on identified issues • Educate community on the cultures within their neighbourhood
Housing: provision, design & layout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situate houses less far apart (due to noise) • Less trees near homes • More affordable houses • Reduce height of buildings to support clear views • (Homeless) Shelter • Improved housing (quality)
General Amenity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less noise from neighbours (dogs, fighting, lawnmowers) • Reduce noise from cars in residential streets • No-smoking in public spaces (e.g. parks) • Streets where children can play (safely)
Child /community safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe house • Training for dogs • Free swimming lessons • Knowing your neighbours and having someone to trust • <i>Protection from parents/carers due to effects of alcohol</i> • <i>People making unsafe choices (COVID-19)</i> • Less alcohol sales (relationship to drunk driving and ant-social behaviour) • Prevention of crime burglary • Local Police station
Sustainable future(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'career' fair for children ('future careers') • Environmental education to change attitudes and behaviours • More jobs • More green spaces • University/TAFE for education • Eco-friendly facilities
Animal welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog park/exercise area(s) • Animal (rescue) shelter • Reduce litter (prevent access for native animals and birds)

Accessibility (movement and transport)	
Issue	Suggestion
Road(s): repair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repair potholes
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-user access (pedestrians, cyclists, cars) • Improved road system: more round-a-about • Car parks adjacent to shopping centres

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drop off zone for schools • Recreational and other facilities/uses within walking distance to where people live • Widening of roads • More bus routes and bus stops
Road(s): safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repair roads • Install and improve footpaths • Increase (Pedestrian) crossings • More Traffic lights • Install speed cameras • Traffic calming ('speed humps') • More signage ('slow down for children') • No street parking

Infrastructure and services	
Issue	Suggestion
Parks: amenities, design features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playgrounds (all ages, interests, all weather) • Play equipment: swings, slides • Diverse experiences: nature, active (adventure – parkour; fitness - gym equipment) • Toilets • Bins • BBQs • Picnic/seating areas • Water bubbler/drinking fountain • Dog park / area
Parks: landscaping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open grassed space • Trees and flowers for visual amenity and wildlife • maintenance of green spaces • shade
Parks: maintenance/repair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • old equipment in disrepair (paint, repair) • overgrown lawn/grass and shrubs • Bins • BBQs • Shade
Facilities: Sports/recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swimming pool • Water park • Basketball courts • Football oval (Rugby, Soccer) • Tennis courts • Netball courts • Cricket nets • Skate- /scooter-/(BMX) bike- park • Grandstand/Stadium (sports) • Cinema • Gym • Dance studio

Infrastructure and services	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trampolines
Waste Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bins • Recycling centres • Mandatory recycling requirements • Incentives for cleaning up (i.e. collecting rubbish) • Increase fines for littering • Local action around 'cleaner' neighbourhoods
Activities/services: Sports/recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free football classes • Free basketball classes • Sporting events (amateur and professional) • Free Swimming lessons
Libraries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More local libraries • technology library • Improved range of books and other items in libraries • After-school/homework support
Facilities: Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bigger 'fields' • running track • more iPads • essential resources, (clothing and stationery) • security cameras
General amenity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More bins • Cleaner streets • Less graffiti
Information & Telecommunications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free WiFi • iPad for each child • public telephones
Health: access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • location of health services/centres (hospitals, GPs) outside of central Liverpool • improved access to GPs (priority access for children/families) • vaccinations and testing for COVID-19 • support for children's mental health